

Future Shock

State leaders race to prepare the Copper State for explosive growth

An official letter from the state's Lawn and Pool Use Enforcement Division says you must choose between taking out your green lawn or draining your swimming pool. You can't have both, as the state has been severely restricting outdoor water use ever since the population of Central and Southern Arizona swelled to 10 million people around 2040.



By Melissa Bordow

You opt to keep the pool because urban sprawl and the heat-island effect have caused Arizona to break yet another of summer days when the temperature fails to drop below 100 degrees.

But time in the pool is getting rarer. Your daily commute from Pinal County to Phoenix is a grinding two hours. You to home, but job centers and transportation routes haven't reached your relatively new subdivision.

Welcome to the Sun Corridor, circa 2050.

With foresight, unified planning and a significant investment in the state's infrastructure, the above scenario need not

Without it, according to the author of a recent report on Arizona's future, a part of the state risks becoming, not the its bland sister — the San Fernando Valley.

"You'll essentially get existing urban development patterns spread all over the place in a seamless, homogenous, stores, fast food restaurants and red stucco houses," says Grady Gammage Jr., a principle author of "Megapoli Corridor," published by Arizona State University's Morrison Institute for Public Policy.

The report predicts that land stretching from the middle of Yavapai County to western Cochise County to the someday merge into one integrated super metropolitan area — a "megapolitan" dubbed the Sun Corridor.

That doesn't mean there will be uninterrupted development between Prescott and Tucson — there is too much Indi: the way. Instead, the corridor's economies and commuting patterns will merge.

Imagine a series of overlapping circles emanating from Pima, Pinal and Maricopa counties. According to a measu scholars at the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech, if at least 15 percent of workers from one area commu commuting patterns have merged.

Already, Pinal County sends 40 percent of its workers into other regions, most likely north to Maricopa County.

"That means Maricopa and Pinal are already merged," Gammage says.

Some time between 2010 and 2020, Pinal is expected to send more than 15 percent of its workers south to Pima Coi creating an economic bridge between Phoenix and Tucson.

The U.S. Census designates these areas with cross-region commuting patterns as “combined statistical areas.” The “Megapolitan” report says may happen by the 2020 decennial census.

The Sun Corridor will be one of 10 megapolitan areas in the United States. By 2030, it could be home to 10 million people and 10 million jobs, making it a potential hotbed of wealth and productivity. According to the report, the nation’s office market areas are in megapolitans.

However, as the Morrison Institute report asks, will Arizona be able to harness the staggering potential of such an area?

That would require a whole new level of dialogue and cooperation between the five councils of government, six counties and 300 other governmental units spanning the 30,000-square-mile area that would make up the Sun Corridor.

And the state is just at the beginning of that process, Gammage says, adding, “We’re behind the curve.”

Shannon Scutari, on the other hand, believes she sees progress every day.

As Gov. Janet Napolitano’s policy advisor for growth and infrastructure, Scutari is on the front lines of important issues, including the long-term planning exercise developed by the Urban Land Institute, AZ One - A Reality Check for Arizona at the Phoenix Convention Center.

AZ One assembled more than 300 people from Maricopa and Pinal counties and guided them through alternative scenarios for the purpose of generating discussion and consensus.

“They’re talking to each other, there’s no doubt about it,” Scutari says of the disparate public and civic leaders she encountered. “Some of them are actually even listening to each other.”

Scutari adds that the governor hopes to see the AZ One exercise duplicated in the Tucson and Flagstaff areas.

While her office is trying to bring several growth issues into sharp relief, Scutari says a pressing challenge is the state’s transportation infrastructure.

That is why the Arizona Department of Transportation has begun a \$7 million statewide study and is working with local governments, land-use planners, regional transportation organizations and others to assess the state’s infrastructure needs.

One important feature of the Statewide Transportation Planning Framework, Scutari says, will be to connect local transportation infrastructure, something that has never been done. The study already has outlined some transportation needs.

Right now, the governor is backing an initiative campaign to put on the November ballot a one-cent increase in the state sales tax. The increase would raise \$42 billion over 30 years to pay for transportation infrastructure.

The money is needed as Arizona’s roads and freeways are “only going to get worse in the next 25 years,” warns Tim L. Seidman, research and consulting for ASU’s L. William Seidman Research Institute.

James headed a team that spent a year studying the state’s infrastructure and its ability to handle growth. The report endorses the Napolitano-backed initiative, but it did say that without changes in funding mechanisms, the state’s infrastructure will not keep pace with growth.

“There will be longer commutes, there will be more time spent in traffic, you’ll be traveling at lower speeds,” James says. “There will be more congestion and less safe journeys. The road system is going to become unacceptably poor.”

The report, commissioned by the Arizona Investment Council, formerly known as the Arizona Utility Investors Association,

that accommodating growth is going to be “very, very costly” — probably \$417 billion to \$532 billion in the next 25 years.

In that time period:

- Electricity demand will increase by about 85 percent, yet the state faces a funding gap in paying for new plants.
- Just providing telecommunications services to the state's current unserved population would cost up to \$2 billion.
- The art fiber network that would guarantee high quality telecommunications would cost about 10 times that.
- Water delivery and treatment systems built decades ago will need to be replaced.

While it is impossible to predict exactly what the Sun Corridor will look like in 2040, planners do know generally where

Eric Anderson, transportation director for the Maricopa Association of Governments, says projections show most growth will be in the West Valley as developable land in the east diminishes. Pinal County, where it meets the Maricopa County southeast of Queen Creek and the 275-acre state land parcel dubbed Superstition Vistas, will see a lot of growth. Finally, Anderson says, areas around Casa Grande and Maricopa will continue to expand.

According to MAG's latest figures, there are about 1.8 million housing units already approved or entitled in various communities in Maricopa and Pinal counties.

Jay Hicks, co-chairman of the AZ One steering committee and a vice president at EDAW Inc., an architecture and engineering company, says people still can shape the character of future development, even in the face of all that entitled land.

Some parcels may need to be re-entitled as time passes and communities become more cognizant of the way land is used, levels and energy consumption.

Additionally, 40 to 50 percent of all commercial properties will need to be redeveloped in the next 15 to 20 years, Hicks says.

Facing the challenges that come with growth seems daunting, but Scutari says there is “a sense of optimism among stakeholders.”

As Gammage put it: “There is an opportunity here, if we can seize it and get ahead of it, we can do something really significant.”

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